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Malaysia as the Archetypal Garden in the British Creative Imagination

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European travel writing (1512–1984) represented Malaysia as a tropical Garden of Eden, an image that has also percolated into literary texts concerning the region. This article examines spatial images in British fiction through the framework of archetypal literary criticism and theories of colonial representations of space to reveal the worlding (Spivak 1999) of Malaysia as a garden. In order to ascertain the ways in which the garden archetype has been deployed by the British creative imagination in the past and the present, novels from the colonial and postcolonial periods have been selected for analysis. Three dominant incarnations of the garden archetype can be discerned throughout novels by Joseph Conrad, W. Somerset Maugham, and Anthony Burgess: the lush, Romantic garden; the restrained, disciplined Victorian garden; and the barren, dried-up garden. The postcolonial British novel, for its part, deploys images of the barren garden revived (William Riviere's *Borneo Fire*) as well as a return to the earlier Conradian image of the Romantic *locus amoenus* (Frederick Lees' *Fool's Gold*). This article concludes that the representation of Malaysia in various guises of the archetypal garden negates the indigenous worldview concerning space and produces instead "knowledge" about Malaysia rooted in the white man's perspective.

Keywords: archetypes, British fiction, colonialism and space, Malaysia, representation

Introduction

Since the arrival of Portuguese traders in Malacca in the sixteenth century, Malaysia¹⁾ has been represented in European travel writing and fiction as an archetypal garden. This is also the case in English literature, for example, the novels and short stories by Joseph

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1) "Malaysia" is used in my reading of Conrad as a loose term that encompasses Sumatra and North East Borneo because of their proximity to what would eventually become Malaysia (Hampson 2000, 14).

Conrad, William Somerset Maugham, and Anthony Burgess; in addition, these works and their authors have been regarded as canonical where Malaysia is concerned. Therefore, this paper reads images of Malaysia in British fiction through the framework of archetypal literary criticism and theories of colonial representations of space to reveal the production of a specific body of knowledge about Malaysia revolving around the garden archetype. The focus of this article is on representations of British Malaya: the parts of the Malay Peninsula under British administration (1786–1957); Singapore (1819–1957); British Borneo, that is, the parts of Borneo ruled by the Brookes (1842–1946) and the British North Borneo Company (1882–1946); and Malaysia, that is, the federation of 13 states in the Malay Peninsula, Sabah, and Sarawak (1963–present). It highlights the importance of representations of space in shaping the British creative imagination on Malaysia, where previous research focused on representations of its peoples and cultures. It also extends the discussion of literary works on Malaysia beyond that of the British writers who are more familiar to readers—Conrad, Maugham, and Burgess—to others such as Frederick Lees and William Riviere.

The archetype of the garden, suggesting “paradise; innocence; unspoiled beauty; fertility” (Guerin *et al.* 2005, 189) is an important and recurrent image in travel writing about Malaysia. Sixteenth-century Portuguese travel accounts portrayed the countryside of Malacca as a veritable Garden of Eden, with abundant waters and excellent soil from which the local inhabitants could easily pick their food. Besides edible plants, there were others that could be commercially exploited. Godinho de Eredia, for example, reported seeing various trees and shrubs that could produce “gums and oils that one could fill a ship’s hold with . . .” (de Eredia [1613] 1997, 22).

In eighteenth-century travel narratives, Malaysia is still portrayed as a garden. A Portuguese text on Johor by Joao de Vellez Guerreiro celebrates Johor’s climate of “perpetual Spring” and “the large and diverse growth of many trees” (de Vellez Guerreiro [1732] 1935, 119). Western fascination with the country intensified in the nineteenth century as the rise of imperialism and developments in science and technology during the Victorian Age in England brought British men and women to Malaya and Borneo to rule it and to study it. There were explorers, naturalists, colonial administrators, political agents, missionaries, tourists, and travelers. A variety of texts were written, from many perspectives, to portray the Malay Peninsula and North and West Borneo, and the archetypal garden consistently appeared in such writings. Isabella Bird, the famous Victorian travel writer, spoke of the Malayan jungle as “a huge spread of foliage, bearing glorious yellow blossoms of delicious fragrance” (Bird [1883] 2006, 135), while in Borneo James Brooke described his first impressions of being in the rainforest, using distinctly Edenic imagery, as “nature fresh from the bosom of creation . . . stamped with the same

impress she originally bore!" (Keppel 1846, 19). A variation on the garden archetype found in Hugh Clifford's stories about Malaya (1897) is the "enchanted land," where sensual delights and experiences await the European who dares to venture here.

A century later, V. S. Naipaul, a British writer of Trinidadian origin, arrived in Malaysia to record his impressions of the country. Employing the archetype of the garden in his account of the lush vegetation and what to him was the extreme fertility of Malaysian soil, he wrote:

The land was rich: rain and heat and rivers, fertile soil bursting with life, with bananas, rice fields, palm trees, rubber. Grass grew below the rubber trees; and cattle, which would have suffered in the sun, found pasture in the shade. The heat which in the town was hard to bear was in the countryside more pleasant. Water and sun encouraged vegetation that sheltered and cooled; and green quickly covered the red earth where it had been exposed by road works or building developments. (Naipaul 1982, 254)

The intertextuality between travel literature and works of fiction concerning Malaysia presents us with the possibility of the garden image spilling into fiction, perpetuating the image across genres and generations of writers who have traveled in Malaysia. Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965), and Anthony Burgess (1917–93) are writers whose novels and short stories have made the country familiar to generations of English-literature readers.²⁾ Their works roughly represent the early colonial period (Conrad), the high colonial period (Maugham), and the late colonial period (Burgess). As for the postcolonial period, William Riviere (1954–) and Frederick Lees (1924–) have added to the corpus of fiction about Malaysia, tackling themes and events from the Malayan Emergency (1948–60) to the deforestation of East Malaysia.³⁾ This paper examines the role of the garden archetype in representing Malaysia in the following literary texts: Joseph Conrad's *An Outcast of the Island* (1896); William Somerset Maugham's stories in the collection titled *The Casuarina Tree* (1926); Anthony Burgess' *Time for a Tiger* (1956); William Riviere's *Borneo Fire* (1995); and Frederick Lees' *Fool's Gold: The Malayan Life of Ferdach O'Haney* (2004).

Archetypal literary criticism involves a close study of images and motifs, in other words, archetypes, defined by Carl Jung as "mental forms . . . which seem to be aborigi-

2) Joseph Conrad is a British writer of Polish origins who traveled to India, the Malay Archipelago, and Australia as a merchant sailor between 1874 and 1893 (Stape 2002). William Somerset Maugham is a British novelist and playwright who visited Malaya and Borneo between 1921 and 1922 and again between 1925 and 1926 (Holden 1996). Anthony Burgess taught in Malaya and Brunei between 1954 and 1960 (Burgess 2000).

3) Frederick Lees served in the Malayan Civil Service after the Second World War up to the 1950s (Lees 2004). William Riviere is based in Italy and has traveled in Southeast Asia and East Asia (Hodder & Stoughton website, <http://www.hodder.co.uk/authors/author.aspx?AuthorID=2041>).

nal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind" (Jung 1978, 57). The garden is one such archetype, and it has appeared in various incarnations in the mythologies and literatures of the world. In this paper, the garden archetype in colonial and postcolonial British fiction are investigated in order to reveal the British project of "worlding" Malaysia (Spivak 1999)—representing and producing specific images of Malaysia through the imposition of Western notions of truth, knowledge, and the importance of writing.

The research questions that this paper will answer are as follows: What are the patterns in which the garden archetype is used to represent Malaysia in British fiction? In what ways do the patterns of images in which the garden archetype appears reveal specific archetypes about Malaysia? In what instances are the garden archetype used and repeated throughout the literary texts analyzed? What are the combinations of the garden archetype, colonial rhetoric, and/or strategies of worlding with which the British creative imagination represents Malaysia?

Previous literature on European colonialism and its representation of colonized peoples, cultures, and spaces in Malaysia and other regions are reviewed in the following section in order to establish the position of this paper in the field. It is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework used to examine the garden archetype in the works of Conrad, Maugham, Burgess, Riviere, and Lees. Jungian archetypal criticism, theories of colonial rhetoric by David Spurr (1993) and Pramod Nayar (2008), as well as Gayatri Spivak's (1999) concept of worlding provide this study with the theoretical tools to answer the research questions. Also included is a section reviewing the meanings and significance of the garden motif in the Malay world and in the West in order to provide a background to the analysis of the garden archetype in British fiction.

The analysis divides the literary texts into those from the colonial period and those from the postcolonial period so as to trace the patterns of the garden archetype used to represent Malaysia over a period of almost 110 years.⁴⁾ The conclusion summarizes the patterns in which the garden archetype is used by British writers to represent Malaysia and the notions about Malaysia that is produced as a result.

The use of the term "Malaysia" to refer to the geographical and sociopolitical areas covered in the works of the abovementioned British authors might to some be ambiguous. Joseph Conrad wrote his fiction in a time when the British were consolidating their power in not just the area included in today's Federation of Malaysia, but also in Java, Sumatra, and Northeast Borneo (Hampson 2000, 15). Similarly, the settings for William Somerset Maugham and Anthony Burgess' fiction are Sarawak and Perak respectively, before the

4) The earliest novel chosen for analysis is Joseph Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) and the most recent is Frederick Lees' *Fool's Gold* (2004); a gap of 108 years exists between these two works.

creation of the Federation of Malaysia. However, the term “Malaysia” is used in this paper as a collective term for the various geopolitical incarnations encompassing the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Borneo, and Sumatra from early British involvement at the end of the eighteenth century to the present, and is not restricted to the Federation of Malaysia that came into existence in 1963. This definition follows that of an early nineteenth-century coinage of the name “Malaysia” to refer to “a geographic-zoological-botanical region comprising the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Borneo, Sumatra, and Java” (*ibid.*, 14).

Literature Review

This paper aims to shed more light on the ways in which Malaysia is imagined by the West, a subject that has been addressed by several literary scholars but which is still relatively unexplored. For example, the portrayal of Malaysian peoples and cultures in fiction by Joseph Conrad is the topic of numerous studies such as van Marle (1985), Lester (1988), Hampson (2000), and Masood (2007). The representation of Malaysians in William Somerset Maugham’s short stories is the subject of Holden’s 1996 study, but few have actually addressed his and Conrad’s representations of the Malaysian geographical environment. Studies by GoGwilt (1995), Zawiah (2003), and Yeow (2009) are the few that focus on the representation of Malaysia instead of Malaysians and their culture. Fewer still examine fiction by postcolonial British writers; Subramaniam and Pillai’s 2009 article on Henri Fauconnier’s *The Soul of Malaya* (1931) and William Riviere’s *Borneo Fire* (1995) are the exceptions. Meanwhile, Said’s (1978) framework of Orientalism remains the main theoretical approach in analyses of representations of Malaysia, for instance, in Hawthorn’s 2006 chapter on Conrad’s African and Malaysian fiction. This study proposes instead that archetypal criticism and worlding be deployed in readings of images of Malaysia in order to facilitate a careful study of how an archetypal image like the garden participates in the production of knowledge about Malaysia according to the British, from colonial to postcolonial times.

There are signs of colonial ideology at work in the seemingly innocent descriptions of landscape in fiction, which Zawiah Yahya examines in *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (2003). This book is a vigorous critique against the pitfalls of reading English literature without equipping oneself with an awareness of the colonial discourse at work within such “canonical” texts. One of the ways in which colonial discourse infiltrates English literature is through descriptions of space, otherwise known as setting. Zawiah critically engages with novels by Joseph Conrad and Anthony Burgess (those with a Malaysian setting) to show how “novels claim space and convert it into a system of meaning—just

as colonies claim territories and turn them into systems of meaning" (*ibid.*, 106). Descriptions of space function as strategies of control through the author's "claim to knowledge" (*ibid.*, 168) about the lay of the land.

The importance of Zawiah's work to the present study lies in its exhortation to postcolonial scholars and readers to be aware of how colonial ideology "interpellates" them (Althusser 2000) through literature. It also introduced the need to examine critically the ways in which Malaysia has been represented by the British during the colonial period. It applied various literary theories to provide an "against-the-grain" reading of Conrad and Burgess, including Marxist literary criticism, formalist criticism, and post-structuralism. This paper aims to extend the project of re-reading English literature initiated by Zawiah, looking specifically at representations of the Malaysian geophysical environment, applying Jung's theory of archetypes, contemporary postcolonial theories on colonial rhetoric, and representation through worlding.

The importance of spatial images to colonialism was discussed in detail by Mary Louise Pratt in her study *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). It draws attention to the ways in which narrative and rhetorical strategies were employed by European travelers to portray South America and Africa as wild, sublime, or idealistic. Pratt indirectly invokes archetypes in her observation that the European naturalist-traveler often portrays himself in the narrative as "Adam alone in his garden . . . [i]n the writing, people seem to disappear from the garden as Adam approaches . . ." (*ibid.*, 51–52). This suggests that the Garden of Eden is a significant image in the representation of colonized land by Europeans, while the motif of the lone white man writing about his surroundings evokes worlding, an act in which the European imposes himself onto the space he colonizes via the act of writing (Spivak 1999, 209).

This paper will also identify the narrative and rhetorical strategies that help establish the garden archetype in British fiction about Malaysia. One of them is the Romantic rhetoric on space, which Pratt highlights in her analysis of nineteenth-century European travel writing.

Other studies on spatial representations of land in colonial narratives have also taken a similar path as Pratt's by highlighting the various types of colonial rhetoric on landscape images. David Spurr (1993), for instance, identified several modes, among which the following are relevant to landscape and space:

- **Surveillance**, or the establishment of power relations between colonizer and colonized and colonized space through the gaze
- **Appropriation**, or the seizure of land using the justification of "inheritance" and on moral grounds

- **Debasement**, or the representation of colonial space as the site of disease and filth
- **Eroticization**, or the depiction of colonizer and colonized land in gendered and sexual terms
- **Negation**, or the rhetorical strategy “by which Western writing conceives of the Other [space] as absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death” (*ibid.*, 92); and
- **Insubstantialization**, or the rendering of the exotic, non-European space as lacking reality, stability, and coherence

Spurr’s categorization of rhetorical modes enables a systematic approach to reading behind the seemingly neutral images of landscape described by colonial writers. It is particularly useful to examine the rhetorical processes with which British fiction worlds Malaysia, as the garden archetype can be established through eroticization, debasement, and negation. There are at present no previous studies which have taken this approach towards the representation of Malaysia in British literature, and so this study aims to fill that gap.

However, more recent studies theorizing the representation of space via colonial and/or imperial discourse reflect a growing awareness of the significance of spatial imagery within the field of postcolonial studies. They highlight not just the role of literary texts, but also that of travel writing, in the creation of specific images of colonies in Africa, America, Asia, and Australia. They usually combine several theoretical perspectives in addition to postcolonial criticism, thus providing new and interesting readings of colonial spatial representations. One such work is Pramod K. Nayar’s *English Writing and India, 1600–1920: Colonizing Aesthetics* (2008). It explores the nature of colonial rhetoric on landscape in more detail, using colonial writing on India from the seventeenth century onwards as case studies. Nayar writes exclusively on British colonial representations of Indian space, which echoes this paper’s project of looking at British colonial representations of Malaysian space as distinct from other colonial powers such as the French and the Dutch. Like Spurr (1993), his interest is in how rhetorical strategies have been employed by the British to understand and represent an unfamiliar space:

. . . particular aesthetic modes trope[d] India in specific ways in order to demonstrate English control and power over it. The various tropings of India were *transformative* in nature, proposing particular roles for the English in India. In the early, mercantile age it helps English rhetorical or narrative control over Indian variety and vastness. The later aesthetics of the picturesque and the sublime map a colonial shift from a primitive, poor and desolate India to an altered and “improved,” “Englished” one. (Nayar 2008, 3)

Nayar’s work is useful to this research since it gives priority to spatial representa-

tions of the colony rather than to the colonized peoples and their culture. His study follows up on the work done on textual strategies of colonial discourse on space by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and David Spurr (1993). This paper applies some of Nayar's concepts in the analysis of the garden archetype (see "Methodology"). However, while Nayar describes the images of India in colonial writing from an aesthetic perspective, he does not treat them as instances of archetypes in a British collective unconscious⁵⁾ on India. It is the archetypal perspective on space that this article foregrounds.

In light of the objectives of this paper, Sharae Deckard's *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden* (2010) adds support to the proposal that the British worlded Malaysia using the garden archetype. Applying cultural materialist, ecocritical, and postcolonial perspectives, Deckard compares the varieties of paradise discourse in which Europeans have represented colonies lying in tropical regions: Mexico, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Sri Lanka. Her discussion of the discourse on paradise is particularly relevant because of Western literary and mass media representations of Malaysia as a tropical paradise or tropical Eden. This study focuses on the production of knowledge by the British through an image related to paradise discourse—the garden; however, it does not cover as broad a geographical area as Deckard's work nor the economic ramifications of the garden archetype in contemporary times, both of which require a separate research.

As for studies on fictional portrayals of Malaysia, Norman Sherry's *Conrad's Eastern World* (1971) is an early attempt at mapping out Conrad's Malay world. Sherry sets out to reveal the real-life inspiration of the fictional Patusan and Sambir that appeared in novels such as *Almayer's Folly* and *Lord Jim* (identified as an amalgamation of Berau, on the northeast coast of Borneo, and Sumatra). On the whole, Sherry's book would be of interest to those who would like to know the "autobiography" of Conrad's characters and settings, so to speak. However, aside from providing definite compass points with which a reader of Conrad's stories can navigate him/herself with, it is not a critical piece on spatial representations of Malaysia.

Recent studies have sought to address the gaps in Sherry's work. For example, Jeremy Hawthorn (2006) provides a reading of the sexual politics between male colonizer and female colonized enacted in the tropical jungles of Borneo, the setting of Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). According to Hawthorn, the landscape—the fecund, "writhing" jungle—becomes a metaphor for the danger that the female colonized subject

5) Jung introduced the concept of the "collective unconscious" in addition to the individual unconscious theorized by Sigmund Freud. The collective unconscious exists in all human beings and is universal in nature, containing archetypes that are also shared by mankind.

poses to the male European: “The desirable woman in Conrad’s fiction, often displaced into mud and creepers, tempts, undermines, corrupts, and finally kills and consumes the vulnerable man” (Hawthorn 2006, 232). This projection of the Oriental femme fatale onto the tropical landscape invokes the enchanted garden (Frye 1990, 149) that seduces and traps the gullible hero. In this way, Malaysia becomes part of the colonial “porno-tropics”—a “libidinally eroticized” zone on which Europe projects “its forbidden sexual desires and fears” (McClintock 1995, 22).

Hawthorn’s arguments revolve around the concept of binary opposites discussed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). The opposing pair of Oriental woman-as-predator and European man-as-prey in Conrad’s African and Malaysian fiction reveals the racism in Conrad’s works. Rather than seeing such images as binary opposites, this paper proposes instead that they be viewed as archetypes that help establish a certain image of Malaysia. The Oriental femme fatale that Hawthorn notes in *An Outcast of the Islands*, for instance, can be read as the negative anima⁶⁾ (von Franz 1978, 187) that could serve as a means of Othering. In the context of colonial representations of space, archetypal figures also contribute to the representation of Malaysia as an archetypal garden, as will be discussed in the analysis.

Christopher GoGwilt (1995) and Agnes Yeow (2009) have also given more attention to the significance of landscape in Conrad’s Malaysian fiction. Both argue that Conrad’s depiction of space and landscape is crucial to understand how notions of the “West” and the “East” in the age of imperialism were constructed. The landscape of the Malay Archipelago is subjected to an eroticizing treatment in Conrad’s fiction, says GoGwilt, in order to naturalize the irrevocable difference between the “East” and the “West” (GoGwilt 1995, 50). However, he adds, Conrad’s exotic landscape more often than not reveals the problems behind this “natural” division of “East” and “West.”

The representation of Malaysia in English literature also contributes to how the “East” is constructed as a region that defies definition and comprehension. Agnes Yeow (2009) identifies the imagery of the sea in Conrad’s Malaysian novels as one of the means by which this mysterious “East” is fashioned. The following extract from Yeow’s study ties in with Spurr’s argument that colonial space is subjected to the rhetoric of insubstantialization (Spurr 1993, 142), and suggests that spatial imagery helps support a notion of the disorienting Orient:

6) The anima or the archetypal feminine refers to the feminine aspect present in the collective unconscious. “What is not-I, not masculine, is most probably feminine, and because the not-I is felt as not belonging to me and therefore as outside me, the anima-image is usually projected upon women” states Jung (1991, 27).

In Conrad's East, the sea is a vast and potentially distorting mirror where refracted and fragmented images abound and where reflections rather than the thing itself are emphasized. The imagery Conrad employs again and again in describing his fictional land and seascape evokes a nebulous and hazy setting where things are not quite what they appear to be. (Yeow 2009, 162)

GoGwilt and Yeow's studies show that images of the Malaysian landscape do inform how the "East" appears to Western minds and its transmission to Western readers through the novel and short stories. This paper also adds to the available literature an examination of images of Malaysia in works by colonial and postcolonial British writers besides Joseph Conrad, who has so far received the most attention from scholars.

To conclude, this paper emphasizes the significance of representations of space in the production of knowledge about Malaysia by the British in their literary texts. The archetypal framework of criticism has not been applied before to studies on images of Malaysia produced by British writers; this approach is relevant considering the recurrence of the garden archetype in travel writing. The works of lesser-known British writers will also be examined, since scholarly focus on Joseph Conrad tends to overshadow his contemporaries and those who wrote in the postcolonial period.

Methodology

Images of Malaysia in the novels and short stories chosen for this study are analyzed through the frameworks of archetypal literary criticism and colonial rhetoric to reveal the worlding of Malaysia via the garden archetype. Gayatri Spivak defines worlding as the process of "Europe . . . consolidat[ing] itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as 'Others'" (Spivak 1999, 199). Worlding and writing are related in that writings about colonized regions produce a fictional version of the space represented (*ibid.*, 203). Using the example of India's representation by British colonizers, Spivak examines the production of knowledge about India in archival material about the Rani of Sirmur. She proposes that worlding involves several strategies: the investment of authority in the white, male subject and author as the "custodian of truth" (*ibid.*, 205), the rewriting of colonized space as "empty" in order to enable the colonizer's truth and ideology to prevail (Spivak 1985; 1999), and the redefinition or at times, rejection, of pre-existing native information and sources (Spivak 1999, 228).

Worlding theorizes representation as a textual act, focusing on the role of writing and textual material—specifically, historical and archival texts—in producing knowledge of colonized peoples and regions. Archival material is dissected for its gaps, silences, and slippages in order to highlight the discourse of history as an agent of worlding. It is

relevant to this study because it explains how representation works through the written word. The selected novels and short stories are the textual materials that produce a certain body of knowledge or fiction of Malaysia, while at the same time erasing the meanings already given to Malaysia by its indigenous inhabitants. This paper will emphasize the role of the garden archetype as an additional dimension in worlding Malaysia.

First, the portrayal of Malaysia in images invoking the garden archetype will be examined through the frameworks of colonial rhetoric on space outlined by Spurr (1993) and Nayar (2008). Spurr (1993) proposed the following rhetorical tropes that can be applied to readings of spatial representations: surveillance, appropriation, eroticization, debasement, negation, and insubstantialization. Nayar (2008) suggested these tropes: the social monstrous, the imperial sublime, the missionary picturesque, and the sporting luxuriant. For this study, a slight modification has been made to the last two of Nayar's rhetorical tropes in order to widen their scope—the picturesque and the luxuriant.⁷

Next, the role of the garden archetype in representing Malaysia is examined. Worlding, as explained earlier, is a process of representation (or misrepresentation) that purports to portray reality according to the colonizer's own ideology and vision of truth (Spivak 1999). Similarly, the representation of Malaysia by the British through variations on the garden archetype establishes a certain view of Malaysia that is filtered through colonial ideology. Therefore, the images in the selected literary texts will be examined to determine if the following acts of worlding occur:

- The representation of Malaysia through archetypal imagery (that is, the garden) inflected with colonial rhetoric
- The representation of Malaysia as “empty” of all except the white man/woman
- The representation of the white man/woman, whether the author or his characters, as “the sovereign subject of information” (*ibid.*, 217) vis-à-vis the native subject

Before moving on to the analysis of images, this paper briefly discusses what the garden symbolizes in the Malay world, in order to outline what preceded and then coexisted with images of Malaysia in Western narratives. The following is a brief summary of the garden according to the Malays as it appears in their language and literature, followed by an overview of Western notions of the garden archetype.

7) Nayar defines the missionary picturesque as the “visual vocabulary and aesthetic ideas . . . in order to trope Indian primitivism and colonial improvement” (2008, 94) present in travel writing by English missionaries in India, while the sporting luxuriant refers to the colonial rhetoric that specifically applies to descriptions of the jungle and wildlife in hunting memoirs. Thus each trope is specific to the genre of travel writing it is found in.

The Garden in the Malay World and in the West

The garden is a significant icon that has appeared in the religious and secular literatures of the Malays for centuries. A pre-Islamic notion of a paradise-garden for those who are righteous and obey God is evident in the inclusion of the Sanskrit word *sorga* meaning “heaven” or “paradise” in the Malay language (Malay: *syurga*). As for secular literature, some Malay *hikayat*⁸⁾ feature garden-like magical kingdoms known by the generic term *kayangan*. Virginia Hooker cites an example of such a garden of pleasure, called *taman ghairat* in *Hikayat Indraputra*, “encircled with a trellised fence of copper with golden gates, trees fashioned from precious gems, bathing places, golden peacocks, verse-singing birds, performing fish, pavilions carpeted with sumptuous rugs, golden thrones and nymphs providing food and drinks” (Hooker 2009, 341).

Images of the garden in the Qur’an are also integral to an understanding of the Malay worldview of this space prior to the coming of Europeans in the sixteenth century. Being the first source of reference for Muslim Malays and influential in their literature, the Qur’an contains many descriptions of a garden-like paradise with “rivers flowing beneath.” Below are some examples of Qur’anic verses about paradise:

Would any of you like to have a garden of palm trees and vines, with rivers flowing underneath it, with all kinds of fruit for him therein. (Al-Qur’an 2: 266)

Whoso obeyeth Allah and His messenger, He will make him enter Gardens underneath which rivers flow, where such will dwell forever. (Al-Qur’an 4: 13)

And We have placed therein gardens of the date-palm and grapes, and We have caused springs of water to gush forth therein. (Al-Qur’an 36: 34)⁹⁾

The Islamic paradise is a garden for the righteous who obeyed Allah and His prophet, where pleasure is a reward for faith and good conduct.¹⁰⁾ This is subsequently incorporated into Malay literary texts to reinforce the value of piety and education. In her article, Virginia Hooker (2009) traces the uses of the Islamic garden image in the Indonesian parts of the Malay world as a literary metaphor denoting good conduct, the exemplary behavior of kings, and as a model for religious education. Nuruddin al-Raniri’s *Bustan al-Salatin* [The Garden of Sultans], commissioned in 1638, is an Islamic manual

8) Classical Malay epic poems featuring heroes’ exploits and semi-mythical histories of the Malay world.

9) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an*, 2001, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall.

10) John Brookes notes that the expression “gardens underneath which rivers flow” is found more than 30 times in the Qur’an (cited in McIntosh 2005, 36–37).

of good conduct and administration for the Sultans of Aceh (*ibid.*, 344) that uses the title *bustan* (Arabic: garden; Persian: garden, orchard) as a literary metaphor; it also includes a description of the Aceh royal garden, “a garden of delight which reminds Muslims of the wondrous nature of God the Creator and includes a mosque where religious duties may be performed” (*ibid.*, 345). Raja Ali Haji’s *Bustan al-Katibin* (c. 1840s), a text prescribing good and pious conduct among Malay rulers and administrators employs the same metaphor while in present-day Indonesia, the word *taman* (Malay: garden) has been incorporated in an Islamic education program for primary schoolchildren (*ibid.*, 351).

In short, the garden carries a positive resonance in the Malay world, associated with eternal bliss, reward for piety, and superior moral conduct. This percolates into the Malays’ living spaces as well. In the sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa observed that the Malays of Malacca lived in “large houses outside the city with many orchards, gardens and tanks, where they lead a pleasant life” (Barbosa [1518] 1967, 176). Similarly, Frank Swettenham (1993) describes well-planned Malay kampong with fruit trees and decorative shrubs laid out like miniature gardens.

The Jungian archetypal framework lists a variety of garden images, showing the many different meanings and situations in which the archetype appears to the European collective unconscious. Northrop Frye outlines its various incarnations in Western literature: (1) as the garden of paradise, it is the manifestation of human desires, expressed by shaping the vegetable world into gardens, parks, and farms; (2) in demonic imagery, the corresponding garden images are the “sinister enchanted garden like that of Circe . . . the tree of death, the tree of forbidden knowledge in Genesis, the barren fig-tree of the Gospels, and the cross” (Frye 1990, 149) as well as “the labyrinth or maze” (*ibid.*, 150). These images portray a world “before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden, has been solidly established” (*ibid.*, 147). The garden of the world of romance, or the “analogy of innocence” (*ibid.*, 151), includes the Garden of Eden—Frye cites images from the Bible, Milton, and Dante—and the *locus amoenus* as examples. However, the garden is not as prominent in “high mimetic imagery” or the “analogy of nature and reason” (*ibid.*, 153); it appears, for instance, as “formal gardens in close association with buildings” (*ibid.*) such as palaces, houses, and cities. Finally, in “low mimetic imagery” or the “analogy of experience” (*ibid.*, 154), the garden is associated with human toil and labor—indicative of the common experiences of mankind—and is represented in literature by farms.

The German Jungian critic Erich Neumann (1963) has written about the link between the garden, fertility rituals, and female deities in many cultures in the world, indicating the feminine aspect that this archetype can take. In her dissertation on the symbolism

of the garden in ancient texts, the Bible, and apocalyptic literature, Susan Lau outlines its importance as a symbol of fertility, life, and as a means of “reveall[ing] the transcendent or the sacred in and to the profane world” (Lau 1981, 326). Elsewhere, Christopher McIntosh (2005), taking a leaf out of the Jungian approach, elaborates on the multifarious meanings of the garden archetype in Europe: as a symbol of paradise and as human interpretations of the seasonal cycle and spiritual journeys.

The garden archetype also appears in British fiction about Malaysia throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods. Joseph Conrad’s fiction, here represented by his 1896 novel *An Outcast of the Islands*, inaugurates the tradition of portraying Borneo bearing the influence of the Romantic literary tradition, with its emphasis on the sublime. He is followed by William Somerset Maugham (1926), in whose short stories the garden archetype takes on the Victorian virtues of order and discipline in an attempt to control the destructive instincts of white men and women marooned in the tropics. Anthony Burgess’ Malaya in *Time for a Tiger* (1956) then is represented as the barren, dried-up garden, devoid of fertility and beauty, as if the death of Great Britain’s empire in the region also sounds the death knell for civilization as the West knows it.

The postcolonial period sees a waning interest in Malaysia in the British literary world. Few British writers have emerged to rival Conrad, Maugham, and Burgess, and the task of writing about Malaysia seems to have fallen onto the shoulders of young Malaysians based in Europe such as Preeta Samarasan and Tash Aw. The chosen texts represent some of the British fiction on Malaysia available today: *Borneo Fire* (1995) by William Riviere is an “ecothriller” (Kerridge 2000, 245) about the devastation of Sarawak’s rainforests by logging and forest fires; while *Fool’s Gold* (2004) is written by Frederick Lees, a former officer in the colonial British administration of Malaya whose long experience during the Emergency (1948–60) is reflected in the novel. In *Borneo Fire*, the garden archetype is invoked in visions of a lost Eden that needs to be recovered, while in *Fool’s Gold*, we see a return to the Romantic vision of nature first employed by Conrad.

The Garden Archetype in Colonial British Fiction

Lust/Lost in the Garden of Eden: The Romantic Garden of Joseph Conrad’s “An Outcast of the Islands”

Joseph Conrad’s *An Outcast of the Islands* ([1896] 2002, henceforth AO) has as its subject a lonely exile meeting and falling for a beautiful but dangerous woman in his wanderings. Peter Willems, a Dutch trader in Maluku, is condemned to wander, Odysseus-like, in

Sambir, a remote trading outpost located on the northeastern coast of Borneo.¹¹ Like Odysseus, he encounters in Sambir an enchantress figure, Aïssa, the daughter of the old Arab “pirate” chief Omar al Badavi. They begin a passionate but ultimately destructive affair, and used by the Malays as pawns in a political game pitting the European traders (consisting of Captain Tom Lingard and his protégés Almayer and Willems) against the Arab merchant Abdulla. Willems and Aïssa lose their trust for each other, exemplifying Kipling’s adage that East and West shall never meet.

In Borneo’s vastness and lush forests, Conrad found a geophysical setting that lent itself well to that aesthetic value definitive of the Romantic literary movement—the sublime. The sublime is defined by its original proponent, Edmund Burke, as “[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (2001). It is in addition an aesthetics that values emotive descriptions of nature, vastness, obscurity, darkness, and gloom. The rhetoric of the sublime had already appeared in English travel writing on India from around 1750 to 1820 (Nayar 2008). “The aesthetics of the sublime, circulating in England around the mid-eighteenth century,” according to Nayar, “suggested an aesthetic framework for the [English] travelers. An aesthetics of terror and vastness, darkness and obscurity, danger and challenge . . .” (*ibid.*, 64–65). On the other side of the world, in South America, the German explorer, Alexander von Humboldt, similarly wrote of nature’s magnificence and sublimity in language reminiscent of the Romantic writers (Pratt 1992). This Romantic attitude also emphasized “drama, struggle and a certain sensuality” (*ibid.*, 121) in any description of geospatial features.

While Willems and Aïssa’s first encounter in Sambir is depicted in the iconography of Adam and Eve’s first meeting in the Garden of Eden, this is done in the Romantic mold. Willems, lonely and bored in his new surroundings, decides to take a short trip up the river to explore the land for “some solitary spot where he could hide his discouragement and his weariness” (AO, 52). He sees no other human being on his early excursions. Sambir is all his own, making Willems the solitary Romantic hero, whom John F. Danby aptly describes as “a monolithic figure in an empty landscape . . . the metaphysical ‘I’ . . . which insulates us and yet is the very means whereby we have communion with things and with other I’s” (Danby 2000, 49). This also affirms the worlding of Borneo by the white colonizer, who inserts himself as an authority on the region by his claims to know

11) The settings for Conrad’s Malaysian fiction are a hybrid of the places in the Malay Archipelago that he visited as a merchant sailor, for example, Sumatra, Singapore, and Northeast Borneo (Sherry 1971; Hampson 2000). Robert Hampson prefers the term “Malaysia” as that was the term used in the 1830s (Hampson 2000, 14; see the Introduction of this paper).

Borneo in a landscape strangely empty of other human beings.

The scene of Willems' first glimpse of Aïssa takes place in a garden-like space similar to the *locus amoenus*, a "space for sensual enjoyment" (McIntosh 2005, 51) familiar to medieval and Renaissance literature, thus briefly departing from the usual gloom of the Romantic atmosphere. Willems happens to discover a path beside the river one day that seems to be well-worn, and which he believes would lead him somewhere interesting. The path runs beside a brook; following it, he arrives in a clearing where "the confused tracery of sunlight fell through the branches and the foliage overhead, and lay on the stream that shone in an easy curve like a bright swordblade dropped amongst the long and feathery grass" (AO, 53). The brook is an important element in garden imagery for its evocation of fertility, while its sword-like "curve" foreshadows the sinuous form of the female figure; this and fertility are significant motifs in the *locus amoenus*. The sunlight and trees enhance the reader's sense of touch (warmth on skin) and sight (the green leaves, the play of light and shadow), heightening the anticipation of the moment when man and woman would first lay eyes on each other.

Conrad projects onto Aïssa's body the archetype of the garden, so that landscape and woman are fused together:

She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer of waving green mist, through which the rain of yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face, and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the somber depth of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. (AO, 54)

In projecting the elements of the landscape onto the physical body of the Other woman, Conrad is deploying the familiar colonial rhetoric of "eroticization," which David Spurr defines as "a set of rhetorical instances—metaphors, seductive fantasies, expressions of sexual anxiety—in which the traditions of colonialist and phallogocentric discourses coincide" (Spurr 1993, 170). However, it is equally important to acknowledge that imagery also plays a significant role in the eroticization of Borneo, and that this instance from Conrad's novel illustrates how the garden archetype is used to mark the sexual attraction of both protagonists. The garden is an appropriately representative site and symbol for this to take place because of the sexual connotations of fertile earth, the sowing of seeds, springs and other water features, growth and maturity into flower and fruit. No less important is the "*hortus conclusus*," the woman's body as enclosed garden, "derived from the Song of Songs" (Frye 1990, 152) suggested by Conrad's description of Aïssa.

Between the first meeting of Willems and Aïssa and the moment they became pawns in Babalatchi's game pitting the Europeans against the Arabs, the image of the *locus amoenus* is predominant. This initial encounter, however, gradually descends from the heights of passion to destructive extremes of love and hate as Conrad draws out an important lesson from Willems and Aïssa's doomed relationship: that the two worlds, the East and the West, cannot coexist in the same sphere. To be specific, the relationship is impossible because the female Other is a negative force whose influence is literally deadly to the white male colonizer, for "[T]he colonized territory represents not only sexual promise, but sexual danger as well" (Spurr 1993, 177). In this context, the garden takes on a more sinister image than seemed. The benign aspect is actually deceptive, illusory. In reality, Sambir is the magic garden of the enchantress (Frye 1990, 149), the domain of the beautiful but deadly female memorably described by the Romantics such as John Keats in his poem "La belle dame sans merci." It is then that the aesthetics of the sublime asserts itself in Conrad's images of Sambir.

The sensuality of Willems and Aïssa's relationship, as mentioned earlier, owes itself to the repeated imagery of the *locus amoenus*. As their love deteriorates into obsession and the *locus amoenus* fades from view, it is replaced by the overtly sexual image of parasitic creepers clinging to trees (Hawthorn 2006, 232), invoking a sense of the sublime:

Slowly she raised her arms, put them over his shoulders, and clasping her hands at the back of his neck, swung off the full length of her arms. Her head fell back, the eyelids dropped slightly, and *her thick hair hung straight down: a mass of ebony* touched by the red gleams of the fire. *He stood unyielding under the strain, as solid and motionless as one of the big trees of the surrounding forests;* and his eyes looked at the modeling of her chin, at the outline of her neck, at the swelling lines of her bosom, with the famished and concentrated expression of a starving man looking at food. She drew herself up to him and rubbed her head against his cheek slowly and gently. He sighed. (AO, 109, italics my own)

The lush, forested landscape of Sambir now manifests the overwhelming desire that Willems and Aïssa have for each other. The image of Aïssa's mass of hair and Willems standing still and strong like one of the trees in the forest recall a garden of sensual delights darker than the one implied by the *locus amoenus*. Here is the Romantic garden "powered by life forces many of which are invisible to the human eye; a nature that dwarfs humans, commands their being, arouses their passions, defies their powers of perception" (Pratt 1992, 120). It is a fitting geophysical setting for a love that has progressed into extremes of anger, jealousy, and revenge in the style of *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

The deployment of the garden archetype through allusions to the *locus amoenus*,

the rhetoric of eroticization that accompanies it, and the rhetoric of the sublime in which the landscape is depicted, turns Borneo into a setting for the sexual adventures of the colonizer. The worlding in Conrad's novel also relies on the colonizer representing himself as an authority in defining the landscape (Spivak 1999, 213), as seen in the depiction of Willems exploring the jungles of Sambir on his own.

None of the vestiges of this Romantic vision of the garden, however, remains in later British fiction with a Malaysian setting. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, it has given way to an orderly, disciplined garden after the Victorian worldview. The lushness, extreme emotions, passions, and invisible forces at work in Conrad's portraits of Borneo are by then reined in by the carefully tended garden of the Victorian Age. Nonetheless, the darker forces of human instinct continue to threaten the boundaries of this garden, as Somerset Maugham's stories amply illustrate.

Vice and Virtue in the Garden of Eden: British Borneo as the Disciplined Garden

British Malaya and Borneo at the time of Maugham's sojourn there between 1921 and 1922 and a second trip in 1925–26 (Holden 1996, 95) was not far from the archetypal garden that European travel writers turned to time and again throughout five centuries when describing the region. Malaya in the 1920s enjoyed the economic prosperity that came with being the world's top producer of rubber and tin. The landscape was dotted with orderly rubber plantations resembling English estates (*ibid.*, 98) and presided over by verdant rainforests. Meanwhile, the British carved out retreats in the cool highlands where flowers and fruits familiar to them at home thrived in the lower temperatures (Aiken 1994, 3). The peace and stability of life for the British in Malaya and Borneo before the Great Depression in 1929 that caused tin and rubber prices to plunge added to the sense of living in an enclosed and orderly space—much like being in a beautiful garden protected from the elements by high walls.

One sees in Maugham's images of orderly rows of rubber trees in well-tended plantations, along with picturesque riverside outposts, echoes of the garden archetype that dominates European discourse on colonized spaces in Latin America (Pratt 1992) and South Africa (Low 1996). The garden with its concomitant meanings—a space for peace and tranquility, and a mirror image of paradise (McIntosh 2005, 36)—is the perfect archetype for a region known to the British then for its excellent economic prospects and its natural beauty. And unlike Conrad's sensual and overwhelming garden, Maugham's is restrained and disciplined; it appears as the neat lawns and gardens of British homes and residencies, and as rubber plantations. These well-kept spaces are geophysical manifestations of the still-prevailing Victorian virtues of self-control and an irreproachable moral conduct.

However, in Maugham's stories, this semblance of a disciplined garden is more often than not broken by shocking acts of sexual and social transgressions by the British themselves (Holden 1996, 114). Murder, adultery, and interracial liaisons between white men and native women undermine British efforts to create an Eden in the tropics. Such representations are instances of Maugham's worlding of British Borneo by reinscribing it (Spivak 1999, 211) as a space for the re-enactment of the fall of mankind from a state of bliss into a sinful existence. This simultaneously requires the erasure of pre-existing notions of the garden among the native population of British Borneo. My reading of Maugham's short fiction also proposes that the rhetoric of debasement (Spurr 1993, 76) operating in Maugham's narratives contributes to the worlding of the land. This is apparent in images of Borneo's geophysical features as contaminating white men and women with the deadly sins of wrath, lust, and envy, among others.

It is worth noting that Maugham's preoccupation with exposing the hidden sins and vices of his countrymen in Borneo reflects the conflicted Victorian attitude towards morality—one revolving around simultaneous attraction/repulsion—as well as prevailing pseudoscientific attitudes towards race and physical environment (*ibid.*, 80). In his stories about British Borneo, Maugham erases the positive meanings of the garden archetype already existing among the peoples of Borneo from the landscape. Instead, Borneo's garden-like façade is represented as a cover for the undercurrents of evil and degeneration running below the surface. These dark urges seduce the white man or woman into committing acts that go against solid Victorian values of family and decency, so that adultery, murder, and treachery seem like everyday occurrences in Maugham's Borneo.¹²⁾

Three stories in *The Casuarina Tree* ([1926] 2005) feature the fictional state of Sembulu—a thinly-disguised Sarawak—whose delightful rural landscape remind each protagonist of the Garden of Eden. Two of these stories will be discussed together because of the similarities in plot and characters. In “Before the Party” and “The Force of Circumstance,” two British women travel to Sembulu for the first time as brides of colonial officers stationed there. After a short period of domestic bliss, both women discover their husbands' dark secrets: one is an alcoholic while the other has had a liaison with a Malay woman prior to marriage.

Maugham's representation of Borneo's geospatial features in these two stories first foregrounds the positive garden archetype as paradise on earth as well as the bower suggestive of domestic harmony. The women are enchanted by their first sight of Sembulu.

12) It should be noted that the expatriate British community in Malaya and Borneo protested at Maugham's misrepresentation of them in his stories.

There are shades of Eden in the following excerpt from “Before the Party” (henceforth “BP”):

She [Millicent] thought of those first months of her married life. The Government launch took them to the mouth of the river and they spent the night at the bungalow which Harold said jokingly was their seaside residence. Next day they went up-stream in a prahu. From the novels she had read she expected the rivers of Borneo to be dark and strangely sinister, but the sky was blue, dappled with little white clouds, and the green of the mangroves and the nipas, washed by the flowing water, glistened in the sun. On each side stretched the pathless jungle, and in the distance, silhouetted against the sky, was the rugged outline of a mountain. The air in the early morning was fresh and buoyant. She seemed to enter upon a friendly, fertile land, and she had a sense of spacious freedom. They watched the banks for monkeys sitting on the branches of the tangled trees and once Harold pointed out something that looked like a log and said it was a crocodile. (“BP,” 31)

Millicent’s panoramic view (Pratt 1992) of Sembulu presents the reader with images invoking the garden—a lush landscape fed by a river, exotic wildlife, and clear blue skies. Interestingly, she feels “a sense of spacious freedom” in Sembulu. This hints at the restrictions that she faced as a woman in Britain, but also establishes her as a figure of authority who assumes the right of defining Borneo for others through her surveillance of its space. Through the power of the written word, Maugham consolidates his voice (via the figure of the white woman) as the authority on colonized space (Spivak 1999, 234).

Similarly, Doris, the protagonist in “The Force of Circumstance” (henceforth “FC”) is ecstatic at the delightful sights that greet her upon her arrival in Sembulu. Once again, the land appeared “friendly rather than awe-inspiring” (“FC,” 159). Doris’ imagination is free to roam the open vistas like Adam and Eve in their garden: “[s]he had no sense of confinement nor of gloom, but rather of openness and wide spaces where the exultant fancy could wander with delight” (“FC,” 159). The abundant greenery and wildlife, coupled with obedient natives waiting to ferry her to her new home, are all reminiscent of the Edenic idyll where the concepts of work and labor do not exist.

While the garden that is Sembulu offers the women freedom from the restrictions of the motherland, other “freedoms” that would contaminate solid Victorian values of family and decency are lurking underneath the surface. At this point in both stories, Sembulu’s potential for corruption is still carefully concealed from view. Only the cunning crocodile that, Serpent-like,¹³⁾ appeared to Millicent’s untrained eyes as a log, hints

13) The form that the Devil took when he tempted Eve to eat the Forbidden Fruit in the Garden of Eden.

at the illusory quality of the images that she is enjoying and her husband's moral downfall.

According to David Spurr (1993, 80–81), one of the manifestations of the rhetoric of debasement in colonial discourse is the transposing of individual instances of abjection among the colonized onto the population as well as onto geophysical space. Debasement lies behind the pseudoscientific belief in the nineteenth century that the climate of Africa or Asia can cause the European to lose his/her self-control and judgment. The rhetoric of debasement “invokes an ancient repertoire of images denoting evil and foreboding apocalyptic destruction” such as “[d]ark, enclosed spaces, infestation, contamination, sexual and moral degradation” (*ibid.*, 90). That geophysical space can also be contaminated by individual sin, filth, and degradation of character is evident in the two women's husbands, whose inability to rein in their baser instincts occurs in an environment that “encourages” sinful behavior. One of Borneo's seemingly corrupting influences that captured Maugham's imagination was the practice among colonial officers in Sarawak of taking local women as mistresses. In view of the very few white women in Sarawak at that time, this was deemed a necessary measure until the officers eventually found suitable British or white women to marry. The practice raised the specter of miscegenation and was particularly abhorred by British women (Brooke 1970, 81).¹⁴ It is a perfect example of how the European's fear of contamination operates on several levels, “social and psychological as well as biological” (Spurr 1993, 87). The women's discovery of their husbands' transgressions raises the fear of social, psychological, and biological pollution. However, neither are white women spared the degeneration of character that comes with living in Borneo: in “Before the Party,” Millicent too falls victim to Sembulu's environment by exemplifying the sin of wrath—she murders her husband in a fit of rage after discovering that he was still drinking despite her efforts to reform him.

In their domestic routine, both women attempt to re-create the state of bliss suggested by their first impressions of Sembulu: breakfast at dawn, work, lunch, afternoon siesta, evening drinks, reading the mail, golf or tennis, and meeting other expatriate British men and women at the club. After all, the garden is a pleasant space only if it is regularly tended to; the order and discipline the memsahibs imposed on their husbands' lives as well as theirs are the means with which they attempted to maintain that ideal. The manicured lawns of British homes also reaffirm Victorian ideals of morality, which

14) Sylvia Brooke, former Rani of Sarawak, explains: “The barrier between the sexes was in those days unbreakable. The Rajah reckoned that if any man in his service got married, he lost ninety-nine percent of his efficiency. If he wanted a woman, there were plenty of Sarawakians, and girls of twelve or thirteen were exploited for this purpose by their parents. It was a vicious doctrine; it drove white men into the welcoming brown arms of the local girls, involved them in tropical entanglements, and produced a harvest that remained long after they had gone” (Brooke 1970, 81).

must be upheld at all costs. Despite this vigilance, the region's propensity for bringing out the white man's darkest instincts cannot be kept at bay. There is the oppressive heat and also the surrounding jungles that represent "the forces of dissolution that wait outside" (Holden 1996, 98), or perhaps more accurately, *within* the garden that Sarawak appears as to Maugham's protagonists as well as to his readers. This archetype Maugham puts to full use in "The Outstation" (henceforth "TO"), where he addresses the rivalry between two colonial officers and its tragic consequences.

Mr. Warburton, the Resident of Sembulu, gets a new assistant, Allen Cooper. They are a mismatched pair: Warburton is a middle-class Eton man and Cooper, a "colonial" born in the Barbados and a foot soldier in the Boer War. They soon discover a mutual hatred for each other. Cooper's blatant racism and superior attitude towards his Malay servants also gets on Warburton's nerves, himself ever courteous and respectful (if also condescending) towards them. After a quarrel over Cooper's abusive behavior towards Abas, Cooper's house-boy, Warburton finds himself wishing for Cooper's convenient death. He resolves to do nothing, waiting for the time when the opportunity would present itself. Warburton's wish is finally granted when Abas kills Cooper after having been wrongfully dismissed from his job.

"The Outstation" is a classic parable of the sins of wrath, envy, and fratricide. Despite the seeming innocence and tranquility of Sembulu's geophysical setting, a palpable sense of menace can be felt in the air. It is only too easy for Warburton to be seduced into ceding to his baser instincts in such an environment, Maugham says, for "[n]one knew better than Mr. Warburton how irritable the incessant heat could make a man and how difficult it was to keep one's self-control after a sleepless night" ("TO," 133). Initially, however, Maugham cultivates the positive meanings of the garden archetype—in the story it appears as an arbor for Warburton to rejuvenate his spirits in the contemplation of nature's beauty—before swiftly unmasking the setting to reveal the evil that it conceals:

He [Warburton] strolled down his garden. The Fort was built on the top of a little hill and the garden ran down to the river's edge; on the bank was an arbour, and hither it was his habit to come after dinner to smoke a cheroot. And often from the river that flowed below him a voice was heard, the voice of some Malay too timorous to venture into the light of day, and a complaint or an accusation was softly wafted to his ears, a piece of information was whispered to him or a useful hint, which otherwise would never have come into his official ken. ("TO," 111)

The riverside arbor first signals tranquility and acts as Warburton's own secret space where his worldly cares can be temporarily forgotten. Yet here too, treacherous voices whisper into his ears, delivering secret information likely gained through underhanded

means. The similarity between this image and that in the Old Testament of Eve's temptation by the Devil disguised as a serpent, sibilating the secrets of the Tree of Knowledge into her ears, is part of the "ancient repertoire of images denoting evil" in colonial discourse (Spurr 1993, 90). It is as if, despite the control that the British attempted to impose on the tropical landscape through their visions of disciplined gardens, the "natural" propensity of the environment for encouraging vice and corruption in human beings keeps battering down the walls erected to keep them out.

Maugham's representation of Borneo relies on pseudoscientific beliefs in the ability of foreign environments to pollute the inherent characteristics of white people, part of the colonial rhetoric of debasement (*ibid.*). The disciplined garden therefore reveals the extent of the colonizer's fear of contamination by Malaysia's geophysical environment. The archetype can also be read as the colonial writer's imposition of his own ideology about the region, which readers are expected to accept as the truth (Spivak 1985, 254).

Maugham's portraits of a tamed garden threatened by moral and social degeneration pave the way for the next incarnation of the garden archetype in colonial British fiction: the garden made barren by the demise of Western civilization from Malaya and Borneo after the Second World War. This was Burgess' vision of the garden at the time of his service in Malaya in the late 1950s. If the Victorian garden of Maugham's stories is blighted with hidden sins and corruption, for Burgess the disease is full-blown, showing itself in Malaya as instances of decay and filth everywhere evident in the landscape.

The Barren Garden of Muslim Malaya in Anthony Burgess' "Time for a Tiger"

Conrad and Maugham's archetypal representations of Malaya as the garden that leads to the downfall of positive European values set in motion a tradition for portraying the region as a fallen Eden in later British writers. One work that encapsulates this tradition at a later period of British colonial rule in Malaya is Anthony Burgess' 1956 novel *Time for a Tiger* (henceforth *TFT*). Published on the cusp of Malaya's independence from British rule (it would formally become independent in 1957), Burgess' novel is a late colonial-era representative of British fiction concerning Malaya.

Conrad and Maugham's use of the garden archetype represents Malaysia as an idyllic but corrupting space, achieved by invoking the imagery of Romanticism and Victorian notions of order. Burgess, on the other hand, invokes the barren garden to illustrate a cynicism towards Islam and its manifestations in Malay culture and attitudes. His worlding of Malaya involves the inversion of the garden's symbolism in Islam and reinscribing over it a landscape marked by deformities and aberrations as well as by instances of filth and contamination. This echoes Conrad and Maugham's treatments to a certain degree; it also reminds one of representations in European travel writing (for

instance, de Vellez Guerreiro 1732; Bird 1883) that portray Malaysia in the context of a region whose landscape is literally tainted by the sins and false worship of the Muslims.¹⁵

The significance of the garden archetype in Islam and to the Malays has been explained earlier. In Islam, the garden is significant as the form of Paradise in the Here-after; see, for instance, the Qur'an (2: 266 and 4: 13). Burgess is familiar with Malays and Islam, having spent six years in Malaya (1954–60) as an officer in the colonial education service (Burgess 2000, vii). He studied Malay and the Jawi script (Habibah 1969, cited in Zawiah 2003, 163–164), and was attracted to Islam (Zawiah 2003, 175). Despite his obvious interest in Malay culture and Islam, his portraits of Malaya in *Time for a Tiger* are not very flattering. His images of Muslim Malaya are inscribed within a combination of various rhetorical tropes of colonial discourse on landscape—what Pramod Nayar (2008, 42) articulates as the rhetoric of the monstrous, and Spurr's (1993, 76) theory of debasement. This effectively erases the connection between Malaya and the archetypal garden of Paradise, thus disavowing the positive impacts Islam has had on the region. Taken together, these images suggest a continuity in British writers' negativity towards the Islamic heritage from the early days of their arrival to the formal end of their rule as implied in narratives on Malaysia's physical landscape.

Kuala Hantu,¹⁶ the setting for Burgess' narrative of British men and women in a rapidly decolonizing world, is central to the inversion of the garden archetype. In naming the town Kuala Hantu—meaning “the estuary of ghosts” in English—he already indicates the irreverence with which Malaya would be treated. The reader's introduction to the town proceeds on the same note of derision:

... Soon the *bilal* [muezzin] could be heard, calling over the dark. The *bilal*, old and crotchety, had climbed the worm-gnawed minaret, had paused a while at the top, panting, and then intoned his first summons to prayer, the first *waktu* [prayer time] of the long indifferent day.

“*La ilahailla'llah. La ilahailla'llah.*”

There is no God but God, but what did anybody care? Below and about him was dark. And the dark shrouded the bungalow of the District Officer, the two gaudy cinemas, the drinking-shops where the *towkays* snored on their pallets, the Istana [palace]—empty now, for the Sultan was in Bangkok with his latest Chinese dance-hostess, the Raja Perempuan [the Queen Consort] at

15) De Vellez Guerreiro describes the consecration of a plot of land granted to the Portuguese by the Sultan of Johor on which to build a church as “sanctifying that land already rendered unclean by the spurious rites of Mohamed and abominable sacrifices to idols” ([1732] 1935, 145). Isabella Bird pronounces the Malay Peninsula as “a vast and malarious equatorial jungle sparsely peopled by a race of semi-civilised and treacherous Mohammedans” ([1883] 2006, 1).

16) A thinly-disguised Kuala Kangsar, the seat of the Sultans of Perak and also where the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), Malaya's experiment with the British public school system, is located. It appears in the novel as Mansor College. Burgess taught at MCKK in the first years of his service in Malaya.

Singapore for the race-meetings—and the dirty, drying river.

“*La ilahaila’lah.*” . . .

God knoweth best. *Allahualam.* The nether fires awaited such, a hot house in *naraka* [hell]. Not for them the Garden with the river flowing beneath. He looked down on the blackness, trying to pierce it with his thin voice, seeking to irradiate with the Word the opacity of Kuala Hantu. (*TFT*, 11–12)

Burgess’ choice of the Islamic “Garden with the river flowing beneath,” in other words, Paradise, to contrast with this decadent town and its dissipated inhabitants, could only have been deliberate. Instead of a garden, we encounter Kuala Hantu at dawn enveloped by darkness. The dark is indicative of its mainly Muslim inhabitants’ spiritual corruption—drinking, womanizing, and gambling seem to be their favorite pastimes, from the Sultan down to the ordinary *haji*. The lifeless river that flows “beneath” Kuala Hantu is another geophysical marker of the town’s degeneration. Like Maugham’s Sembulu, Kuala Hantu’s Edenic façade is polluted with sin, although Burgess represents it in his novel as a physical manifestation of the Malays’ corrupted nature rather than of Malaya’s natural propensity to wear down European strength of character. Burgess’ Malaya is a garden in which the forces of life and beauty are gone and only a wasteland or abandoned garden can be discerned.

Other targets of Burgess’ derision for Muslim Malaya include the mosque, whose domes are “as bulbous as a clutch of onions” (*TFT*, 26), and “the great Hollywood vision of Baghdad, the vast vulgar floodlit Istana” (*TFT*, 97). These edifices, together with the town’s cinemas and drinking shops, emphasize the rhetoric of the monstrous (Nayar 2008, 42) at work in the garden archetype. The rhetoric of the monstrous operates by a displacement of individual instances of deformity onto the population and its social structures:

Troping the Indian body or the Indian religious procession as strange and/or deformed, the English traveler often folds or shades the monstrous into the grotesque. The latter [the grotesque] . . . located deformity as a social phenomenon. It orders Indian people, monarchy, bodies and events into the category of the unnatural to create . . . the “social monstrous.” The “monstrosities” perceived in Indian bodies . . . were portents of the imminent decay of Indian culture and civilization. (*ibid.*)

This is the same way in which the rhetoric of debasement (Spurr 1993, 90) operates in colonial discourse. These tropes are evident in Burgess’ description of the mosque’s deformed “bulbous” domes and the “vulgar” Arabian Nights fantasy that is the palace—a case of architecture signifying the land’s degeneration into the single-minded pursuit of sensual gratification. In this reading, geophysical markers act, like the human bodies

of the land's inhabitants, as indicators of its moral and civilizational decay. The monstrosity of the mosque and palace thus contributes to the representation of Malaya as a perverse version of the Garden of Paradise.

Burgess had better knowledge of Islam and of the Malays than most of his fellow officers. In this he can be considered as part of the corps of "experts" on Malaya, including Thomas Stamford Raffles, Frank Swettenham, Hugh Clifford, and Richard Winstedt, who made the country and its people objects of their study. However, Burgess resorts to images already employed by his predecessors who themselves came to acquire that "knowledge" through the platform of colonialism, which necessitates a superior attitude towards native sources of information. Gayatri Spivak (1999, 228) noted this in her essay on worlding: one of its strategies is to deny authoritative status to pre-existing indigenous records of a country so that the right to speak and write about it lies solely in the hands of the colonizer. Burgess displays this in *Time for a Tiger* by appropriating the symbols familiar to Islam and the Malays only to negate them; this is made possible because the colonial writer has appropriated the right to write (and rewrite) Malaysia.

The garden archetype also figures significantly in *Time for a Tiger's* cautionary message to white men and women of the very real danger of "going native" in Malaya. Both Victor Crabbe, the British schoolmaster posted in Kuala Hantu, and his wife Fenella are vulnerable to this danger; both are fascinated by Malaya, although to different degrees.¹⁷⁾ Malaya's threat is portrayed in several images overturning the positive meanings of the garden archetype in Malay culture. Its fertility is obscene rather than benign, and images of its excessive filth and monstrosity are everywhere apparent. The following description of the market is one such representation:

The market was covered, dark and sweltering. Ibrahim had to mince delicately along foul aisles between rows of ramshackle stalls. Old women crouched over bags of Siamese rice, skeps of red and green peppers, purple eggplants, bristly rambutans, pineapples, durians. Flies buzzed over fish and among the meat bones, ravaged, that lay for the cats to gnaw. Here and there an old man slept on his stall with, for bedfellows, skinny dressed chickens or dried fish-strips. One vendor had pillowed his head on a washbowl full of bruised apples. Thin, pot-bellied Chinese blew cigarette-ash onto sheep carcasses [*sic*] or tight white cabbages. The air was all smell—curry-stuff, durian, fish and flesh—and the noise was of hoicking and chaffering. Ibrahim loved the market. (*TFT*, 102)

At a glance, the portrayal of the market parallels the catalogues of edible plants, fruits, and animals produced by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese colonizers of

17) Victor is portrayed as the serious, passionate scholar of Malaya while Fenella only pretends to the title.

Malacca in their travelogues. But where those early narratives articulated European fascination at Malacca's fertility, Burgess' only registers disgust. Images of rotting meat and fruit in the market, and the bones and animal carcasses hint at the unsavory aspect of life in Malaya should the white man or woman consider becoming part of the country. The durians, whose overpowering smell and taste remind one of "eating a sweet raspberry blancmange in the lavatory," represent the "stink" of Malaya (*TFT*, 70), and the hoicking (sounds made when clearing one's throat of phlegm) of the Chinese *towkay* is made out to be Malaya's signature sound. This market scene presents a landscape marked by dirt, filth, and a perverse form of fertility—abundant but rotting fruits and vegetables—leading to the archetype of the barren garden.

The barren garden represents a British creative imagination grown weary and skeptical towards the Malayan landscape, starkly different from the sensual fear/desire that Conrad displayed towards the verdant space of Borneo. Maugham's troubled Victorian garden image had foreshadowed this later disillusionment with its hints of the corruption that lay underneath the immaculate surface. It is as if the only fitting image to capture the spirit of those times—the end of the Empire, decolonization, the rise of independent nations in the Third World—is a shriveled, infertile garden reflecting the diminished potency of British influence in the world and a barely concealed distrust of the local sociopolitical entities that would replace the British in their former colonies.

The Garden in Postcolonial British Fiction

Recovering Eden: Representations of Sarawak in William Riviere's "Borneo Fire"

William Riviere's *Borneo Fire* (1995, henceforth *BF*) perhaps owes some inspiration to the nineteenth-century writings of James Brooke, since it also features geospatial depictions of Sarawak. Brooke was awed by the majesty of the rainforest but at the same time wished to see them tamed in order to make way for development (Keppel 1846, 18–19). Riviere's characters, on the other hand, have inherited the consequences of Brooke's vision of progress: indiscriminate logging and the resulting floods, forest fires, and the loss of wildlife and way of life of the indigenous tribes. Therefore the characters' desire to save Sarawak's forests becomes more urgent, and the image of a paradise on earth that had once been becomes the defining archetype in Riviere's narrative. Two white men, Philip Blakeney and his son Hugh, stand at the center of this crusade to recover paradise from imminent destruction. The worlding of Malaysia occurs in this novel through the representation of Sarawak as paradise lost and the white, male protagonists as saviors and experts who possess the authority to produce knowledge about Sarawak

(Subramaniam and Pillai 2009, 9).

Philip represents the older generation of Sarawak-born British, a former colonial officer who knew the country's unspoiled beauty before the coming of the timber companies in the 1980s. Through his recollections, the reader gets glimpses of Arcadian spaces such as the one below:

... Long Kai where the stream flowed so cleanly you could see every fish flicker. Where the carved totem poles to commemorate the dead, called *kapatongs*, were still standing and had their magnificence. Where I heard an Argus pheasant call from the forest and they took me to search for it and we found the dancing ground they clear but we never saw the bird—who, for that matter, ever has? (BF, 93)

The tone is nostalgic, and towards the end, speaks of such scenes as mythical. Life is symbolized by the fish in the clear streams of the past, and beauty by the reclusive Argus pheasant whom no one has ever really seen. The wooden poles commemorating the dead signal the lives and traditions of a people closely entwined with that of their physical environment. But what his son, Hugh, and his adopted daughter, Cassandra have inherited instead is

... a wilderness of mud slides and broken trees and dust, a desert where the forest would not grow again, where the creatures and plants were gone forever, where the longhouses and their cultures were gone and no man would come back to plant rice and hunt deer ... (BF, 83)

This is the background for the urgency of Hugh's mission to save Sarawak's rain-forests from the fire devouring them. An environmental and political activist who has been to Burma and Timor, Hugh's heroic stature at times reflect the hero of that other novel by Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900). He is also an idealistic young man with a task to complete in the interior of Borneo, perpetually dressed in white,¹⁸⁾ and with a half-white, half-Iban beauty,¹⁹⁾ Cassandra, waiting for him to marry her once he has put out the fire.

In the island's interior, Hugh finds Philip's "garden of earthly delights" (BF, 93). This is the parts of the forest still untouched by fire, reminiscent of what Philip had once seen and known. Hugh writes to his father of the garden:

Rough travelling all day, one lot of rapids after another. But then we'd drift forward into a quiet green reach and it would look like heaven. Trees reflected in the clean river, creepers festooned, suspended orchids flowering, fish that jumped. Deep blue sky, small white cumulus clouds. Curve after curve of the sultry river opening before us and closing behind. We heard a hornbill's laughter—not a common sound any more. A lot of kingfishers, they sit looking very brilliant on branches

18) In the novel, Hugh is described wearing cricket whites as an unofficial uniform.

19) The parallel figure in *Lord Jim* is Jewel, a girl of white and Malay parentage.

over the water, fly up as we go by. A superb country, a peaceful country—I could travel on and on, lose any wish to arrive anywhere. (*BF*, 189)

The scene is heavenly in a sensual way (“curve after curve of the sultry river,” “suspended orchids flowering”), marking the trope of eroticizing geospatial description often practiced by colonial writers (Spurr 1993, 170). Hugh’s desire to remain in the forest and not travel to a specific destination echoes the anaesthetizing effect of the Malaysian landscape on the traveler once described by Hugh Clifford (1897, 4).²⁰ These residues of colonial discourse imply the strength of the garden archetype in the British creative imagination on Malaysia, surviving into the present.

Hugh’s goal and Philip’s wish are that this paradise be recovered and preserved from the evil forces threatening to destroy it, which were not “nebulous powers of darkness . . . batten[ing] on the great island” (*BF*, 215) but “organizations with names, men with names. The Sarawak Timber Association. The Japan Lumber Importers’ Association. What he [Hugh] called the Asian Progress Mafia Bank. The Sarawak Land Development Board . . .” (*BF*, 215). Their nostalgic renderings of an Edenic landscape now gone or in danger of extinction, while reflecting an awareness of Sarawak’s plight, also reflects a retrospective desire for the paradise of the past that colonial writers such as James Brooke, Isabella Bird, and Hugh Clifford had written so eloquently about. And when presented as a battle between good and evil over that paradise—Hugh, Philip, and their friends on one side; and the fire, the timber companies and corrupt politicians on the other—the archetypal symbols of heroes, villains, and quests come into play, so that Sarawak is reinscribed as a space for the white hero’s fulfillment of his destiny.

While Riviere reveals good knowledge of and sensitivity towards Sarawak’s environmental degradation, Philip and Hugh’s quest to preserve paradise in Sarawak at times come across as patronizing. As defenders of the forest, they speak about it in a patriarchal way. The prominence given to Philip and Hugh by the writer implies that leadership of the quest to restore Borneo’s rainforests naturally falls on the white men because they know more about the land than others do. Philip is an old Sarawak hand (to adopt a colonial term for such experts) while Hugh is a contemporary reincarnation of that colonial figure. Emphasis is given to his Oxford education and his encyclopaedic knowledge of Sarawak’s deforestation, strengthening the hero-crusader image (Subramaniam and Pillai 2009, 9). Hugh’s detailed knowledge of Sarawak also marks him as “the master

20) “As you sprawl on the bamboo decking under the shadow of the immense palm leaf sail . . . you look out through half-closed eyelids at a very beautiful coast. . . . The wash of the waves against the boat’s side and the ripple of the bow make music in your drowsy ears, and, as you glide through cluster after cluster of thickly-wooded islands, you lie in that delightful comatose state in which you have all the pleasure of existence with none of the labour of living” (Clifford 1897, 4).

[who is] the subject of science or knowledge” (Spivak 1999, 216) who invests himself with the authority to represent Malaysia to Malaysians as well as to others. As a result, the Garden of Eden that is to be recovered is subject to the two men’s vision.

Riviere’s postcolonial project of recovering Eden extends to other contemporary British writers, evident in another novel, *Fool’s Gold* (2004) by Frederick Lees. Visions of the garden from Malaysia’s colonial past also inform Lees’ narrative. What Lees revives is the wild, lush Romantic garden of Conrad, with an emphasis on the erotic connotations of the archetypal garden. In a different guise, the white man takes on narrative authority to represent the geospatial features of Malaysia.

Reviving the Romantic Garden: Frederick Lees’ Malaya in “Fool’s Gold” (2004)

As a novel written by a former colonial officer but published in the twenty-first century, Frederick Lees’ *Fool’s Gold* (2004, henceforth *FG*) sits astride the colonial and postcolonial time divide, enabling the question of whether colonial representations of Malaysia as the archetypal garden have survived or perhaps transmuted into something quite different. This novel’s approach to Malaysia’s geospatial features parallels Conrad’s worlding Malaysia as a site for the white male colonizer’s sexual awakening through contact with a desirable Other. Lees’ focus is, however, on homosexual love, portrayed in the attraction between the white protagonist, a British resettlement officer, and his Malay subordinate. The garden archetype, specifically a sensual Garden of Eden, albeit one without Eve, is useful to Lees as a suitable background for the white protagonist to take his sexual experimentations to a new realm—that with the male Other.

Ferdach O’Haney, Lees informs readers, has always had unconventional attitudes towards sexuality even back home in England. He is openly bisexual; his links with the bohemian London crowd contributed to this unconventional view on sexuality. His arrival in Malaya in 1950 as a fresh recruit of the British Colonial Service puts him in the position of discovering the country via various sexual encounters with men and women, white and non-white. These encounters represent Ferdach’s cultural and sexual initiation in a new environment both culturally and sexually. While one of his longest affairs is with a white woman, Ferdach is strongly attracted to Chinese and Malay men. The latter represent his first experience of the male Other, and he discovers that they are no less attractive for not being white; perhaps even more so. In this way, Ferdach is similar to the male protagonists of the French writer Henri Fauconnier’s novel *Malaisie* or *The Soul of Malaya* (1931), whose subtly portrayed attraction to each other represents Malaya as “a homo-erotic geography of adventure” (Ravi 2003, 429) in which only relationships between men matter. In addition, Ferdach is the white male subject as the “sovereign subject of information” (Spivak 1999, 213); as a resettlement officer he penetrates the

Malayan jungles equipped with his [Western] knowledge, mapping territory, and reorganizing the population in service to British efforts to control the spread of communist ideology.

The image of the *locus amoenus* or the sensual garden is again a central and symbolic image against which Ferdach's attraction to Mat Noor, his subordinate, is played out. Much of the action of Lees' novel takes place in the forests of Malaya, concerning as it does the exploits of the British during the Emergency. There is a discernible pattern of images that links the geophysical environment with the protagonist's burgeoning sexuality. In an early encounter not long after his arrival in Malaya, Ferdach notices Laura Sweinsoep, the wife of a teacher, and their mutual attraction is described by Lees in imagery reminiscent of the garden:

Mrs. Sweinsoep kept on glancing at him. She had beautiful olive skin, an oval face and regular features, set off by lustrous black hair that fell in a long sweep over her right cheek down to her elegant neck. . . . Ferdach went to work on a luscious mango. On a large wooden platter, a dulang, shaped like a cooking wok but actually a receptacle used for gold panning, other fruits, papayas, jambus, bananas, rambutans, mangosteens and a pineapple awaited his attention. So colourful, so sensual; he would never be short of vitamin C. He glanced across at Mrs. Sweinsoep and wished he knew her Christian name. She was still looking at him. He allowed a rambutan to wink at her from between his lips, white framed by red, before swallowing it. Their eyes met and they both smiled, she very broadly. (FG, 17)

The sexual connotations of fruit cannot be missed in the description, aside from the oblique reference to the "forbidden fruit"—Mrs. Sweinsoep herself, a married woman. Lees' depiction of the seduction using garden imagery once used by Portuguese and British travelers in the past places not just economic value on Malaysia but also eroticizes it. Such accounts listed the various fruits and plants to be found in Malacca—durians, rambutans, mangosteens, bananas, and other strange fruits—attesting to their wonder at, and later, conviction of Malacca's prodigious fecundity (Pires 1512; Barbosa 1518; de Eredia 1613; Dampier 1931). Lees reworks those lists, reinscribing Malaya's fertile soil as aiding the white man's sexual adventures.

The pattern of a sensual garden in *Fool's Gold* continues as Lees fleshes out Ferdach's sexuality. The following description acts as a prelude to Ferdach's pursuit of a homosexual relationship with Mat Noor:

. . . Early in the morning, the three of them had an almost wordless breakfast. . . . Ferdach would then follow in his newly acquired green Morris Minor to meet up with his team and get on with his census work. The house was left in the efficient care of Cookie, a large self-confident Hakka Chinese, whose real name he never learned, and the garden in that of Yusuf's *wraithlike* young brother Subian who was to be seen each morning *clad only in a sarong* gracefully tending the

haphazard plots of hibiscus, frangipani and canna lilies, or cutting the grass around them in an abstracted sort of way as though he was a celestial gardener tending the lawns of Paradise. (FG, 65–66; italics my own)

The narrative's preoccupation with the male body, represented by Subian's "wraithlike," sarong-clad physique occurs simultaneously with the garden archetype, which appears literally as the garden surrounding Ferdach's quarters. Together with the suggestive phrase—that Subian resembled "a celestial gardener tending the lawns of Paradise"—this passage can be considered, in light of Spivak's theory of worlding, as the white male colonizer's reinscription of Malaysia's geophysical environment as an expression of his own sexual fantasies.

Later, the *locus amoenus* appears again when Ferdach and Mat Noor begin to explore the possibility of a relationship. This takes place in a secluded spot in the forest, Mat Noor's "secret garden," where Ferdach, Mat Noor, and their friend Gordon Choo go for a swim. The spot is "a serenity shut off from the rest of human creation" (FG, 249), which, Gordon points out, is similar to "the Garden of Eden . . . the beginning of the world," albeit one without Eve (FG, 249). As Mat Noor puts it, "[W]e are all Adams. No Eves to make trouble. So we can stay in paradise for ever" (FG, 249). Ferdach's fantasy of male nudity—"that the three of them could be naked for it seemed that nakedness was an aesthetic requirement in such a sylvan scene" (FG, 249)—once again brings up the sexual connotations of the garden, projects his homoerotic fantasies onto the landscape, and marks his initiation into forbidden territory (forbidden fruit again), that is, a relationship with the male Other. As Srilata Ravi puts it, "[i]n the Other space, the slightest breath and faintest flicker are received by all senses at once and nakedness brings kinship with the elements" (Ravi 2003, 430).

The representation of Malaya as a sensual Eden produces an image of Malaysia inflected with eroticization; to know and represent the country to others is to experience it sexually. In *Fool's Gold*, the white man reproduces the geophysical landscape of Malaya through multiple processes of sexual awakening, culminating with an initiation into the most exotic sexual experience of all, that with the male Other. This represents Malaya as an eroticized space ripe for experimentation for the sexually adventurous white male.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the patterns in which the garden archetype is used by British writers to represent Malaysia and the resulting notions about Malaysia that have been produced. Three dominant incarnations of the garden archetype can be discerned

throughout the works representative of the colonial period: the lush, Romantic garden; the restrained, disciplined Victorian garden; and the barren, dried-up garden.

The garden archetype has been used to represent Malaysia as marked by corruption, deception, and sin. This motif is familiar to Western writers from portrayals of Eden in their religious and secular literature, but prior to the coming of Europeans to the Malay Archipelago, not to the indigenous inhabitants of the region themselves. In this way, native inscriptions of meaning regarding the garden are replaced with Western notions of the garden. This is how the worlding of Malaysia works, where Europeans establish themselves as the “sovereign [as] subject with a capital S” (Spivak 1999, 213) and represent regions outside the European sphere as its Others. The role of the white male subject as author of Malaysian images is evident in the selected novels as they ascribe to themselves the authority to represent geophysical features inflected with colonial rhetoric. Worlding also extends to the white male subject as characters in the novels, as they turn Malaysia into a sensual garden of earthly delights (Conrad and Lees) or, in a replication of their creators, appropriate the right to represent Malaysia by virtue of their superior knowledge (Riviere).

In Conrad’s images of Malaysia, one sees elements of the discourse of Romanticism on nature, which paints the geophysical landscape as alive with unseen forces and with which the observer establishes an emotional connection (Pratt 1992). The archetypal anima, or the “eternal feminine,” in *An Outcast of the Islands* symbolizes the combination of fear and desire of the white hero in Malaysia’s forests—sensations that are part of the rhetoric of the sublime central to Romantic and colonial discourses (*ibid.*; Nayar 2008). As the early period of British colonialism in Malaya moved on to the high colonial period, however, the sensual, Romantic garden is replaced by the calm order of its Victorian counterpart. Maugham saw a need to tame the passions that had run wild in Conrad’s fiction as well as in the men and women he encountered during his brief visit to Borneo in the 1920s. This manifests itself in images of neat British residencies and rubber plantations in his fiction.

By the time Burgess published his novel on the eve of Malaya’s independence from British rule, the archetype of the garden in which the land has been represented has attained a barren aspect. The garden, and by association Malaya, is depicted as having degenerated into a wasteland of filth matched by the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of its people.

The revival of interest in Malaysia as a lost paradise, evident in the contemporary novels by Frederick Lees and William Riviere, raises some interesting questions regarding the use of the garden archetype in the present such as: What prompted the nostalgia for a lost paradise? And what does this nostalgia signify? Perhaps there is dismay among

contemporary writers at the rapid changes that have transformed the country such that it is no longer recognizable from the idyllic pictures of colonial times. The archetypal garden therefore is the ideal image on which they can project their atavistic desire, a return to a familiar space in unfamiliar times.

Finally, the literary texts explored in this article feature the experiences of British colonizers and expatriates in the Malay Peninsula (for instance, *Time for a Tiger*, *Fool's Gold*) and Borneo (for example, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Borneo Fire*). The patterns of the garden archetype discussed in this article may lead to further studies that would take into account the different socio-political structures in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo and how those differences would have affected representations of both regions in British fiction. Additionally, the colonization of parts of the Malay Peninsula and Borneo by the British consisted of distinctive policies and practices; it would certainly be worth looking into how these too would have left a mark on how British writers viewed the Malay States and British Borneo in the past and in the present.

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